



Complete The Sentence

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Introduction

Previous research finds that women receive lesser sentences for crimes than do men who commit the same crimes (Bontrager, 2013). Additional research conducted by Walker and colleagues found that women who committed sexual offense crimes against adolescent males received more lenient sentences than men who committed sexual offense crimes against adolescent females; however, the reason for this finding remains unclear (Walker, Lateano, & Benedeeto, 2014). The present study investigated reasons for the gender discrepancy found by Walker et al. It could be that women receive lighter sentences than men for sexual crimes because of gender stereotypes that portray women as loving and caring, compared to that of men who are expected to be strong and self-reliant (Prentice & Carranza, 2002). In the present study I investigated whether gender stereotypes would influence sentences for sexual crimes committed by men and women when the victim is an adolescent. Additionally, I explored whether the gender of the participant would influence criminal sentences for male and female perpetrators.

Method

The 134 participants in the study included 66% women and 34% men, with ages ranging from 18 to 51 years ($M = 20.47$, $SD = 4.25$). Their self-reported races were: White 48%, Hispanic 32%, Black 12%, Asian/ Pacific Islander 4%, and Other 2%.

Participants were asked to read 20 different scenarios of various crimes, and were asked to choose from a list of 8 possible sentences. These sentencing options were:

- | | |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1 = No Punishment | 5 = 3 Years in Prison |
| 2 = Community Service | 6 = 5 Years in Prison |
| 3 = Probation (No Jail) | 7 = 10 years in Prison |
| 4 = 1 Year in Prison | 8 = 20+ years in Prison |

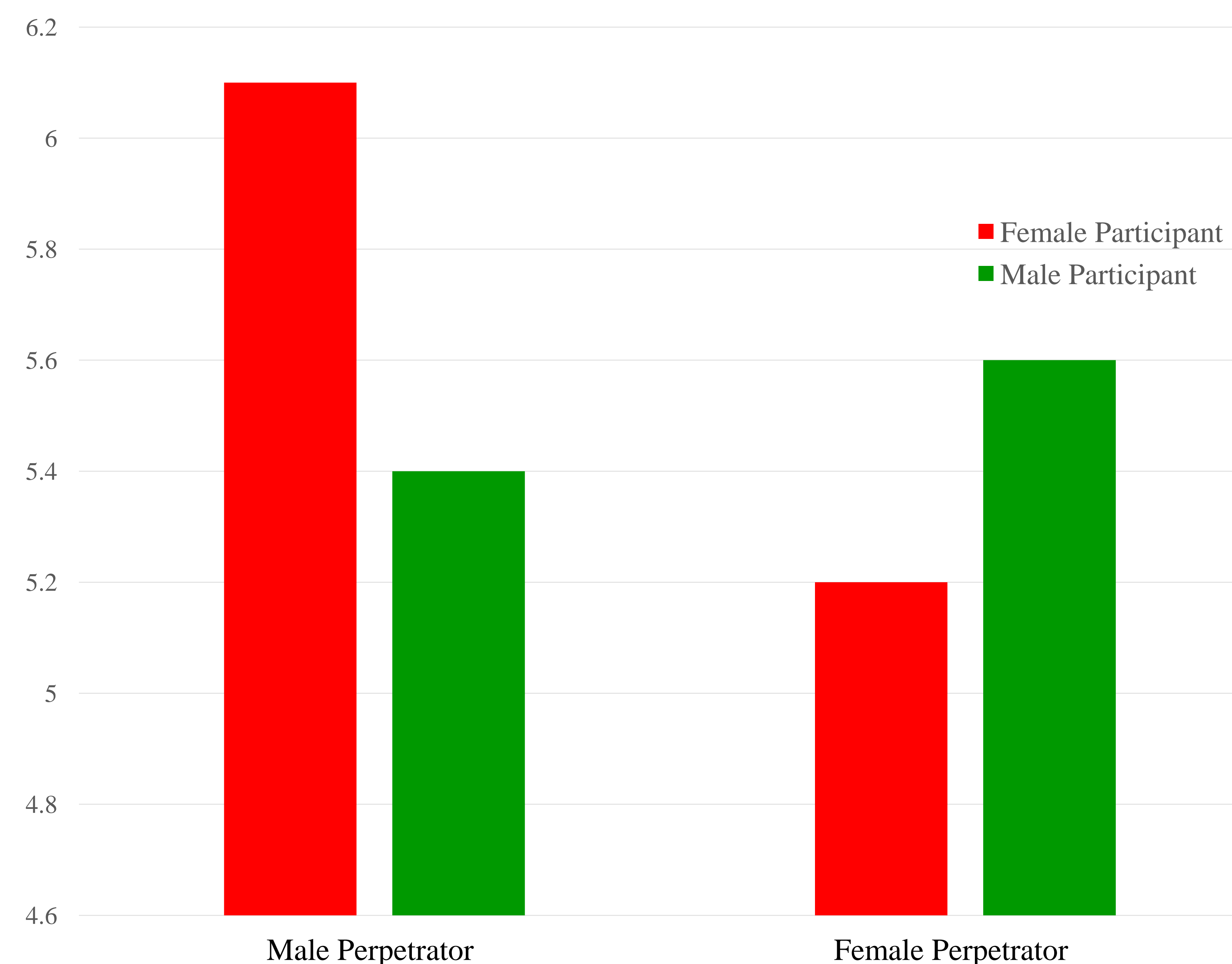
Participants were randomly assigned to one of two versions that varied only by the gender of the perpetrator and victim in each scenario. Included in the 20 scenarios was the critical scenario, which stated: *Bob/ Jill is a high school teacher who has been convicted of having a sexual relationship with one of his/her students, Georgina/George, who is 16 years of age*. Participants were also asked to fill out short answer responses to explain why they chose the specific sentence they did for several scenarios, including the critical scenario. Participants then completed a gender stereotype scale (Hack, 2014) to investigate whether endorsement of gender stereotypes influenced decisions. The scale ranged from 1 to 7, with higher numbers indicating greater endorsement.

Results

To test my prediction that women would receive lesser sentences than men for a sexual offense against an adolescent, I conducted a between-Ss ANOVA with gender of the perpetrator, and gender of the participant as a between subjects IVs. Sentence choices for the sexual offense crime was used as the DV. Greater numbers reflected more harsh punishments.

Contrary to my prediction, results revealed no significant differences between the recommended sentences for the male teacher ($M = 5.77$, $SD = 1.47$) compared to the female teacher ($M = 5.46$, $SD = 1.66$), $F(1,129) = 1.16$, $p = .28$. However, there was a significant interaction between the gender of the participant and the gender of the perpetrator $F(1,129) = 3.89$, $p = .05$, $\eta_p^2 = .03$. Women chose harsher sentences for the male teacher ($M = 6.13$, $SD = 1.36$) compared to the more lenient sentences women chose for the female teacher ($M = 5.24$, $SD = 1.56$), $t(86) = 2.79$, $p < .01$, $d = .61$. There also was a significant difference for the severity of sentences women chose for the male teacher ($M = 6.13$, $SD = 1.36$) compared to the more lenient sentences men chose for the male teacher ($M = 5.41$, $SD = 1.55$), $t(64) = 2.00$, $p = .05$, $d = .49$.

Sentencing of Sexual Offenses by Men and Women



The short answer responses explaining why participants chose the criminal sentence they did were coded based on response content; 1, to indicate negative statements against the criminal and advocating harsh punishments, or 2 to indicate an excuse or reasoning for giving the criminal more lenient sentencing. Inter-rater reliability for two separate coders was near perfect agreement (Cohen's Kappa = .91, $p < .001$).

Results (cont.)

Results from the short answer responses support the gender difference findings; women wrote more harsh comments about men, such as: *"First of all, that's rape. Second, even if Georgina had consented to the sexual relationship, having sex with a minor is illegal and morally wrong. Bob should have been aware of that and not engaged in sexual activity. Plus it's gross,"* yet wrote more lenient responses towards the female teacher such as: *"Just because he was 16 and not 18 doesn't mean that he was not the one pushing to have sex with his teacher."* Interestingly, the term *Disgusting* showed up 5 times for women rating the male teachers, but 0 times for women rating the female teacher.

I also investigated whether participants' endorsement of traditional gender stereotypes would predict their sentencing choices. Suggested sentences were regressed onto gender stereotype endorsement responses. Results indicated that men and women's gender stereotype endorsement did not predict sentence choices for male or female perpetrators (all p 's > .49).

Discussion

The present research is important as it shows the potential influence of gender in the sentencing of criminals. Although the present research did not find an overall effect that female perpetrators received lesser sentences than male perpetrators for sexual crimes against an adolescent, it is likely that this reflects differences in participant populations. The current study did, however, find gender differences, such that when the victim was an adolescent, women more harshly sentenced the male perpetrator compared to the female perpetrator. This could be a result of in-group favoritism that women might have with other women. Previous research supports this idea by revealing that women typically have a stronger bond with other women than men have with other men (Rudman & Goodwin, 2004). Future studies might explore this possibility. The current study has potential implications in the area of law. Individuals who do not fully understand laws and punishments for crimes might sentence individuals on other factors, such as gender.

References

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